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PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS TO FRESHMAN U.S. CONGRESSMEN  
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Panamanian President Nicolas Ardito Barletta told freshman U.S. congressmen Saturday that it is in the United States' strategic interest to increase financial assistance to its Latin American neighbors.

"There is an opportunity because of the present cycles in Latin American societies to strengthen the democratic process," Barletta said at a news conference. "That could best be done by meeting the economic challenges. It is in the mutual interest of the United States and Latin America to explore those areas of (economic) cooperation."

There have been several events which have undermined efforts in Latin America to stabilize their economies, Barletta said.

"It has been difficult for Latin American countries to adjust themselves to the new economic realities around the world," he said. "The world economic recession increased the area's social problems because it increased unemployment."

Barletta emphasized the importance of helping Latin American economies out of their slump.

"It is important to maintain social peace in the area. This can be helped by supporting financial cooperation between the United States and Latin America," Barletta said. "There is only a limit to which you can squeeze people and maintain democracy."

Barletta was in Miami to take part in a workshop designed to provide freshmen congressmen with the opportunity to discuss issues concerning Latin America. The congressmen will be able to discuss issues with the likes of Barletta, former CIA Director William Colby, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Chairman Dante Fascell and Senate Foreign Relations Committee member Paula Hawkins.

Also in attendance was Arturo Cruz, a Nicaraguan former political leader and Seigfried Marks, the chief economist for Latin America for a multinational corporation.

Some freshmen congressmen at the workshop said they attended because Latin America would be an area much discussed in Congress in the coming years.

"I'm getting a thorough overview of the history, background and some of the important policies concerning the area," said Albert G. Bustamante, D-Texas. "It is key for us to understand as much as we can about Latin America and how, perhaps, we can formulate some policies to stimulate the area's economies and perhaps help bring about some real stability."

"I hope to hear diverse views on the political, economic and social issues confronting Latin America and the United States," said Fred J. Eckert, R-N.Y. "Latin American affairs are currently prominent issues in Congress, and they will continue being prominent over the next few years."

The workshops were led by Ambler Moss, dean of the University of Miami Graduate School of International Studies, and Mark Rosenberg, director of Florida International University's Latin American and Caribbean Center.